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INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

TO Back Bay Study Committee
 FROM Paul Donham
 DATE October 22, 1969
 SUBJECT BACK BAY HISTORY, GEORGETOWN HISTORY

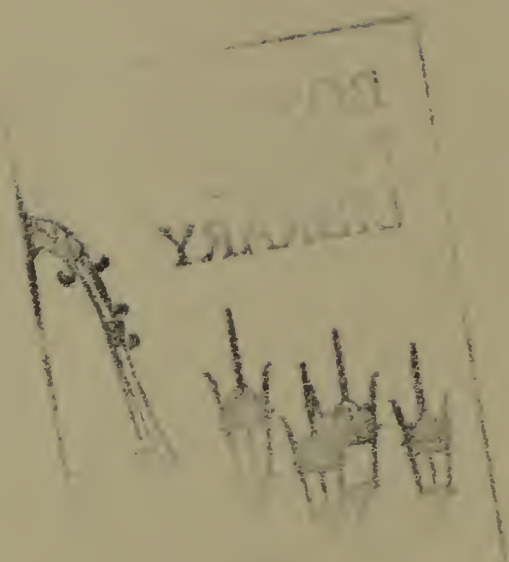
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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BACK BAY DEVELOPMENT

- 1910-1920 - Transition of single family homes to large apartment units.
- 1920-1930 - Accelerated transition produced new apartment buildings on the waterside of Beacon Street at heights reading 10 floors.
- 1930-1960 - New apartment building ceased, however, an increase in demand for converted townhouses to small one and two bedroom apartments, rooming houses, and institutional use continued. Wholesale acquisition of residential property for institutional use increased.
- 1955-1960 - Residential use dropped from 16,700 to 10,800. The number of students and transients increased from 3,000 to 10,500.
- 1956 - Waterside of Beacon Street from Dartmouth, Street to Massachusetts Avenue rezoned from 80' to 155' limit.
- 1960 - BRA's report on Urban Renewal in Boston recommended the retention of the existing height limits in the residential areas with the exception of the waterside of Beacon Street where highrise "might" be acceptable.
- 1962 - The Committee for Commonwealth Avenue (a consortium of architects and other professionals) recommended retention of the existing height limits on Commonwealth Avenue and Marlboro Street and permitting highrise buildings on the waterside of Beacon, the west side of Arlington, and the east side of Charlesgate East.
- 1964 - The city adopted a new Zoning Code which removed height restrictions in Back Bay, and established the present FAR regulations. This rejected any attempt to declare Back Bay as an "historic district" and opened the door to new development.
- 1965 - Mayor Collins requested BRA to study the feasibility of constructing highrise along Commonwealth Avenue. Logue was opposed to the plan; the compromise was the submission of a report by the BRA designating eight highrise locations on Commonwealth between Arlington and Clarendon Streets. The report recommended restoration of the traditional heights in the remainder of Back Bay, except that highrise sites be allowed on the westerly corners of the waterside of Beacon Street. The result of this study was the creation of the Park Frontage Act permitting highrise construction at the eight corner sites on both sides of Commonwealth Avenue.

- 1966 - Realizing that the environmental quality of Back Bay was at stake Back Bay civic groups representing both merchants and residents managed to enact legislation creating the Back Bay Architectural Commission. The purpose of this organization is to promise the economic welfare of the area by "stabilizing and strengthening residential property value."
- 1967 - The Back Bay Development Plan was issued. This plan was sponsored by the Back Bay civic groups and the BRA and jointly financed and administered. The purpose of the study was to clearly indicate problem areas -- their causes and to establish a set of objectives vital to restoring Back Bay as a first class area. A number of consultants specializing in rehabilitation, real estate, finance, transportation etc. concluded that Back Bay could be rehabilitated, that there was an available market for conversion and reconversion. The report, however, inferred that in order for rehabilitation to be feasible, new construction was, indeed necessary. New construction apparently would trigger rehabilitation. The end result of the study recommends a revised zoning package which allows for high-rise construction (200') along the waterside of Beacon Street, similar construction (285') along both Arlington and Charlesgate East. The Park Frontage Act was retained.
- 1968 - Chapman and Goyette, the architectural firm who recommended specific zoning changes in the Development Plan, were hired by the developer, Brainard, to perform preliminary services to develop an ± 80 unit condominium at the northeast corner of Beacon and Dartmouth Streets. The building was planned as a 200' slender tower with parking provided on a 1 to 1 ratio in a garage at the rear of the building facing Back Street.
- Back Bay civic groups while initially having some reservations about the proposal became increasingly enthusiastic.
- 1969 - The original Brainard proposal recently developed into a 294' tower -- beyond the initial scope of the 1967 Development Plan zoning package.
- Today Dan Ahern of the Back Bay Federation for Community Development is pressuring for the revision of the Zoning Code as recommended in the 1967 Development Plan.

GEORGETOWN TOWNHOUSES

- Georgian Major construction of 3-story housing on the south side of
Period - Georgetown overlooking the Potomac.
- 1840-1860 - Developer housing built further down the hill -- cheaper variety.
Moderate income residence forced the beginning of out-migration
of wealthier class.
- 1900 - All housing stock turning from moderate to low income.
- 1948 - Entire region west of central Washington a ghetto.
- 1950 - Drastic increase in Federal job supply created a sudden demand
for housing. Housing starts unable to satisfy demand forcing
younger professionals to seek nearby cheap housing. Rehabilitation
started on a small scale of Georgian housing.
- 1955 - Rehabilitation on a selective basis started in the "better" housing.
Property values multiplied. Poor squeezed out to other deteriorating
housing northeast of the Capitol.
- 1960 - Most of the better part of Georgetown north of Wisconsin Avenue
fully rehabilitated on a private basis. Some housing west along
Wisconsin Avenue too expensive for private rehabilitation --
done by developers and real estate.
- Inhabitants of newly rehabilitated housing are mostly middle
aged executives whose children are gone or off at college.
Incomes probably range from \$50,000 upwards.
- 1965 - Area south of Wisconsin Avenue presently being rehabilitated
although by lower income (\$15,000-\$30,000) professionals because
housing supply low and housing quality not as good as Georgian
homes. Some housing is used as apartments for students and
secretaries.
- A point worthy of mention is that the size, style and building
materials used are most conducive to rehabilitation. Rooms
are small -- ceilings are low. Scale is not overwhelming
psychologically very conducive to single family use.

